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ABSTRACT

This document reviews the student-initiated program IMPACT, developed at Concordia Teachers College, Nebraska. The purpose of this volunteer program was to create opportunities for students to become involved with people and society in general as soon as they arrive on campus. A pattern of "withdrawal and return" is created. Students leave the classroom to penetrate the needs of the community and return to process the experience on the basis of analytical skills of their peers and instructors. The leadership of IMPACT is manifested in three student filled positions: program leader, project leader, and staffer. A faculty member provides part-time assistance. During the 1970-71 academic year, over 1,100 students participated in one or more of IMPACT's programs. These programs include a pre-school program which resulted in a community day care center, juvenile court companions, companions for the aged, a telephone referral service, tutorial programs, youth workers, instructional aides, and recreational activities for retarded children. Developments resulting from IMPACT include credit granted for two IMPACT programs, creation of courses based on IMPACT programs, and the establishment of a Center for Field Experience at Concordia. (MJM)

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VOCATIONAL CLARIFICATION, COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND CURRICULAR CHANGE THROUGH A STUDENT-INITIATED AND STUDENT-LED FIELD EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

Submitted to
Distinquished Achievement Award Committee
of
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of
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Concordia Teachers College is a unique center for learning. It is parochial in that its major energies are directed to the preparation of men and women for a Lutheran school system. It is isolated from an urban society in that it is located in a small town community in eastern Nebraska. It is limited curricularly in that over 95% of its graduates become classroom teachers. There are advantages to some of these conditions; but, the college does recognize some shortcomings. That is why Concordia chose to support a growing, student-initiated program known as IMPACT.*

Operating with the assumption that one learns at a more rapid rate when he assumes the responsibility for his learning, the IMPACT Program was established on the principle of volunteerism. With volunteerism as its modus operandi, the IMPACT Program seeks to create opportunities for students to become involved with people, and society in general, as soon as they arrive on campus. The strategy for the program

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*Immediate Mobilization of Persons Agreeable to Committing Themselves.

is to create a rhythm of "withdraw and return" within the community. In other words, by leaving the confines of the classroom to penetrate the needs of the community and return to process the experience on the basis of analytical skills of their peers and instructors, the student becomes engaged in personal growth which has a bearing on his present needs--needs identified and brought into focus by the experiences. When that happens, books become alive. Memorized principles take on new meaning. Priorities are reordered. New modes and lines of inquiry are begun.

All the traditional elements of experiential learning are evident in the IMPACT Program. Knowledge is gained through direct confrontation with real educational and community issues. Insights into the society outside the college are experienced, and simplistic answers to tough societal problems are not as easily tolerated. Needless to say, a person's maturity and self-reliance are enhanced by his role as a para-professional in the community. Many institutions of higher education offer programs that get at the above mentioned learnings. What makes IMPACT unique is that the participation of the students is voluntary. This, coupled with a philosophy of positive investment,* encourages a full responsibility to the learning experience from its outset, as well as the requisite commitment for continued personal growth.

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*An AACTE Award for Distinguished Achievement, 1969, was awarded to a project at Concordia based on the principle that "positive normal relationships beget additional relationships." That project is now part of IMPACT.

A Brief History

To gain a perspective, it would be helpful to take a cursory look at the IMPACT Program's brief history. The program grew out of a concern of a small number of Concordia students who were searching for meaningful ways of becoming involved in the community and participating in their chosen vocation early in their college years. In the spring of 1969, twelve students left the campus for a weekend retreat to plan a strategy for arriving at the above mentioned issues. They took a couple of interested professors with them. When they returned, they had a name - IMPACT - and a clearer idea as to what they were about. The 1969-70 academic year witnessed a low profile program with sporadic forms of involvement. A student-led neighborhood pre-school was started. Over a hundred students were sent to urban centers in an exposure project. And a number of students became involved in instructional aide and tutorial situations. Although there were hard times due to limited funds, unsophisticated ways of supporting each other, and a variety of organizational problems, the program had proven itself to the community, the college and, most important, to the students. The students decided to continue the program during the next academic year. A number of students were identified to help reorganize in the fall.

The leaders of the college community heard and saw what positive effect the program was having in the community and with the students. They wanted to provide a more tangible form of

support. Their task was to help maintain the open, free climate of the student-led program and expand its efforts so that a larger number of persons might become involved.

To create an organizational structure which would permit student leadership with commensurate power, authority, and responsibility is difficult. After all, Concordia operates under the same institutional press as many schools of higher education in that it seeks control and institutional integration of all its activities. The college was also aware that the institutionalization of a student-led program often announces its death. The college did not want that; but, it did want to expand the program and make better utilization of its benefits. Here is how it developed.

How It Works

Upon the request of the student leaders, a building was set aside to house the IMPACT Program. It was an old house which lent itself as a meeting place, a telephone referral center, a tutorial site and offices. The college also appointed a faculty member to a part-time position for the purpose of assisting the student leaders by serving as:

> A Catalyst - Identifying and attempting to simulate new avenues of service or involvement among students as well as outside institutions.
>
> An Entrepreneur - Attempting to bring together the needs and capabilities of the communities and the college.

A Co-ordinator - Trying to consult in the design of an organization which would take into account the variety of activities growing out of the IMPACT Program in the most efficient manner possible.

A Supporter - Struggling to maintain the people as well as the developing organizational structure.

Even though a faculty position was created, the leadership of IMPACT remained with the students. That leadership power has been manifested in three basic roles: the project leader, the program leader, and the staffer.

The program leader assumes the most critical role in the IMPACT Program. This person serves as the co-ordinator of a specific program (e.g. tutorial program, companion program, Indian reservation program, urban recreation program, etc.) and is responsible for recruitment and supervision of the volunteers within the program. It is possible that a program will be made up of a number of similar projects. For example, the tutorial program has six different sites. When that is the case, each site has a leader. He is selected by the group with whom he is working and designated as a project leader. He has the co-ordinating responsibility of that specific project.

The other leader role is that of the staffer. Five students are selected by the program leaders every spring to fulfill the staffer role. They serve in voluntary administrative capacities during the summer months (not very active) and the next academic year. They help identify the program leaders in the fall and provide the continuity needed from one year to the next.

Their major functions are assisting in the recruitment of volunteers, soliciting funds,* supporting program leaders, stimulating new programs and providing training for all volunteers.

A council of program leaders and staffers determine all the operational policies for the IMPACT Program. One of the major functions of this group is to help students with new programs. If a number of students want to start a new program, they bring their ideas to this group for clarification and support. This organizational design helps avoid the creation of an overly bureaucratic structure where the power is invested in a small group. It works.

Vocational Clarification

Over the years, one of the most discouraging dimensions of teacher education has been lack of commitment to the preparatory process prior to practice (student) teaching. Practice teaching was often the first real encounter with many of the important elements of the educational process. Many students did not spend any

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*Over 70% of the operating budget came from outside sources in the form of grants, gifts and payment of transportation costs by the agency being served.

measurable time in the classroom or with children before their senior year. The IMPACT Program has helped Concordia students to examine their vocation at an earlier date.

Many of the IMPACT Programs provide experiences in fields other than education, such as, mental health, political science, and social work. Concordia College has experienced an increased number of attritions because people have left for other professions due to experiences they had. The college realizes the sooner a vocational decision is made by a student; the sooner the student will be participating in a relevant form of education-for him.

Community Involvement

To turn over 1000 volunteers loose on a community is an over-whelming experience. There were and still are periods of adjustment with regards to how best to utilize the resources of the volunteers. Many agencies are equipped to move the IMPACT volunteers into an active para-professional role, but a number of them have to retool to take advantage of the new resource. The 1970-71 academic year was a very active one for IMPACT. Over 1100 or 73% of Concordia's student body participated in one or more of its programs.

IMPACT volunteers do not just participate in support roles. For instance, a community day care center was established in Seward this year as a direct result of the pre-school program conducted by an IMPACT group since 1969. Now students are serving as support staff for the day care center as well as conducting their own pre-school program on Saturdays. Some other community programs are: juvenile court companions, companions for the aged, a telephone referral service, tutorial programs for children and youth, youth workers, instructional aides and recreational activities for retarded children.

Curricular Change

The activities of IMPACT have effected a number of changes within the academic domain of the College. It would be impossible to measure the influence such activities had on classes in general. Hopefully, students come back from their experiences with insights and more responsible modes of inquiry. However, there have been a number of observable curricular revisions which have a direct relationship to the program. For instance, the professional education curriculum now grants credit to all sophomores participating as instructional aides as the laboratory portion of its general education course. Similar credit will be given for a one-to-one relationship with a child or youth during the junior year. Both of these activities grew out of IMPACT programs.

Specific courses and independent activities have developed from IMPACT programs. Examples are a sociology practicum that grew out of an IMPACT urban exposure program and an Indian education course which had it genesis in an IMPACT tutorial program on the reservation.

Another interesting development growing out of the IMPACT program is the establishment of a Center for Field Experiences at Concordia. At first, the Center's major function was to support the work of the IMPACT Program. More and more, it is becoming a clearinghouse for all experiential activities of the college. IMPACT is now part of the Center in that the director of the Center is also the faculty consultant to IMPACT. The Center is co-ordinating the programs which have a direct relationship to academic requirements.

As IMPACT programs become incorporated into the more institutional predictable efforts of the college, there is a noticable response by the students. They are taking ownership in the development of the college as a growing center for learning. They realize they are a real resource for college change.

The Future

It is difficult to say what shape the IMPACT Program will take five years or even two years from now. Its developmental strategy is based on a philosophy which allows the program to

"become"—to grow naturally in response to the needs of community and the students and faculty staffing it.

There is one predictable dimension of the program. It will continue to play an important change agency role at the college. It will provide an open system for effecting change and channeling student activism.